

embroidery

THE TEXTILE ART MAGAZINE

January /
February 2014
£4.90

**Kyoko
Sugiura**
& the poetry
of stitch

**SANDRA
DUFOUR**

*exploring the art
of illustration*

THE GOLDEN AGE OF
**ENGLISH
EMBROIDERY**

**TALKING TEXTILES
IN THE HOME**

**INSIDE
FRAYED**
*textiles from
the edge*



9 771477 372020 01

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

Gao Rong's subtle embroidered sculptures interpreting objects from her home and studio skilfully ensnare the viewer in an illusion of reality

When Gao Rong enrolled at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, she admits that a rebellious streak and the lack of a sense of artistic direction probably made her a 'bad student'. However that all changed when Rong discovered the work of Tracey Emin. The young artist realised that she could utilise the embroidery skills taught to her by her grandmother – a language traditionally handed down to girls by elder women in China – in a fresh way. 'In the act of sewing there is a connection,' she says.

Rong's latest work pictured here was created for the artist's first major solo exhibition, *I Live in Beijing* and is a realistic and imaginative expression of the artist's memories of her studio and home. In an almost intangible slight of hand, each of the sculptures is actually a carefully embroidered three-dimensional rendering of a familiar object or place.

Instead of depicting the familiar and traditional iconography of flowers, dragons and birds associated with Chinese embroidery, Gao Rong stitches cracking paint, rust, grime, dust and the effects of time in her life-like sculptures which are realised through a skilful handling of material such as wire, sponge, steel frames – and brought to life with embroidery.

By recreating familiar objects and environments, such as a leaking and rusted shower room, used shipping crates and cardboard boxes, as well as a life-sized motor-tricycle, Rong pulls the viewer into her unique world. There viewers are invited to investigate the subtle details that affect and define her life, ensnaring them in an illusion of reality.



Gao Rong, *After July 21st Box No1*
Embroidery, cloth, foam
43 x 32 x 26cm 2013

After July 21st Box No2
Embroidery, cloth, foam
34 x 25.5 x 18cm 2013

In *I Live in Beijing!*, Rong's reconstructed *Sofa No 1* and *Sofa No 2* appear to be ordinary white sofas but in fact are meticulously embroidered with thousands of stitches that simulate the wear and tear of years of use. Rong has produced a record of her studio by crafting thread facsimiles of the ordinary and overlooked. Cardboard boxes and a large shipping crate become works of art, whilst replicas of the kind of construction panels that are facilitating China's rapid growth stand as testimony to the environment in which the artist works.

The highlight is a masterful reproduction of a motortricycle, known locally as a *Beng Beng*. From the tyre treads to the speedometer, every detail of the vehicle has been captured with extraordinary specificity and care. Jo Hall talked to the artist about her practice.

Traditional embroidery was conceived as surface decoration: a non-realistic embellishment of a two-dimensional flat surface. Where did the inspiration come from to use embroidery to create a realistic three-dimensional sculpture?
 'For me, embroidery is a way of expression. Using embroidery as an artistic language challenges the idea that embroidery is merely decoration. In using this language to present the ageing of everyday objects, I am offering limitless possibilities to the viewer, which encourages the redefinition of embroidery.'

What are the themes that your work addresses? What are you hoping to express through your work?

'Embroidery is symbolic of my emotions. Each stitch is representative of my life experience and is an expression of nostalgia. Embroidery helps me to display the extraordinary qualities that exist even in the simplest objects. In this way, I am offering a critique of the world I live in.'

How do you define your work?

'I am a sculptor who uses embroidery – not an embroiderer.'

Do you stitch the pieces yourself – or do assistants/others create the embroidery?

'I do not stitch the pieces alone, assistants help me and we get the work done together.'

What's next?

'I will continue to use embroidery to create my work. I would like to make pieces that carry more of my own personal attributes. If the time comes when I don't want to pick up a sewing needle again, I can't say what kind of work I'll produce.' 🍷

I Live in Beijing! showed at Eli Klein Fine Art
 17 September–20 October 2013
ekfineart.com



CV GAO RONG was born in Hang Jin Hou Qi, Inner Mongolia, China in 1986 and earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, where she currently lives and works. Her work has been exhibited in shows around the world, including *I Call the Shots of My Youth*, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China (2010); *Super-Organism*, Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum, Beijing, China (2011); *All Our Relations*, 18th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2012); *Transformation: A View on Chinese Contemporary Art*, Istanbul Modern, Turkey (2012); and *More Light*, The 5th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, Russia (2013)

What Type of Car Can a Motor Tricycle Be Exchanged For?
 Embroidery, wood, iron, sponge, cloth, leather
 180 x 195 x 95cm 2013